

## **Make Sure Your Turkey Is Cooked; Food Handling Tips for Thanksgiving**

**FRANKFORT, Ky. (Nov. 22, 2002)** - Like most Americans, many Kentuckians will sit down to a turkey dinner this Thanksgiving to celebrate and share time with family and friends.

Since food is a common feature for most holiday celebrations, the Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services wants to make sure the food is prepared and cooked properly. Even though our foods, processors and suppliers are some of the best and safest found anywhere in the world, each year some Kentucky families may experience illness from their Thanksgiving meal. Many Thanksgivings include the traditional foods, and most are safe, but the Cabinet for Health Services wants to make sure to remind Thanksgiving cooks to follow some general food safety precautions.

"Many food-borne illnesses in Kentucky may be attributed to improperly handled foods in our homes," said Guy F. Delius, assistant director, Division of Public Health Protection and Safety. "There are some simple and easy food safety practices we can do in our own homes to minimize the occurrence of food poisoning."

"While it's important to handle foods in the home safely all the time, it's especially important to take extra care during the holidays, because families are preparing more food than usual and more family members may be helping in the kitchen," Delius said.

Anita Travis, manager, Food Safety Branch said, "Food is often made in other family members' homes and transported to the meal site, and people often eat the leftovers for days; it's so very important to make sure these foods are handled properly."

### **Tips for handling food safely**

- When dealing with poultry, make sure it is not undercooked and do not let raw poultry or meat juices touch any other foods.
- Cooks should wash their hands frequently when handling food, and sanitize utensils such as knives, and items like cutting boards so that food is not cross contaminated.
- Wash food including fruits and vegetables before preparing it.
- Food should be promptly refrigerated.

Health Officials also underscore the importance of washing hands often and thoroughly. Unclean hands often are the source of food contamination. Always wash your hands prior to preparing foods. Make sure to wash your hands after handling raw meats and produce. Use soap, warm water and dry your hands with clean paper towels. In addition, there are other guidelines below to keep food safe.

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### **Guidelines for Thawing a Turkey**

Thaw in a refrigerator with the temperature at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or less. Allow 3-4 days for thawing. Place under cool running water at a temperature of 75

degrees Fahrenheit or less; or if the entire thawing and cooking process will be done in the microwave oven, increase the temperature by 25 degrees Fahrenheit over normal conventional oven temperatures for a turkey to ensure even, thorough cooking in the microwave and cook it immediately after thawing. When thawing turkey in a microwave oven, cook it immediately instead of letting it sit out.

### **Guidelines for Preparing Turkey and Stuffing**

Cook at 325 degrees Fahrenheit until the internal temperature of the meat reaches at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit with no interruptions in the cooking process. A meat temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit should be maintained until the turkey is served or the meat should be immediately sliced and refrigerated on shallow platters so that rapid cooling will occur.

It is not possible to cool a whole cooked turkey in an ordinary freezer or refrigerator within a few hours. Any undercooked juices, stuffing or meat in the thickest part of the turkey may result in bacterial growth over extended cool down time, such as overnight or for longer than four hours.

Platters should not be stacked on each other since proper air circulation is necessary to facilitate cooling. A turkey should be thoroughly cooked and rapidly cooled. A metal stemmed, dial-type thermometer placed in the thickest part of the thigh or breast should be used to measure the turkey's internal temperature. It is best to cook the turkey and stuffing separately. If they are prepared together, the turkey should not be stuffed until immediately before cooking.

### **Transporting Foods**

Make sure foods are either fully cooked and transported hot, or transported cold. Insulated containers will help keep foods hot or cold for a short period of time. The use of clean plastic coolers with plenty of ice will also keep foods cool during transportation.

### **Suggestions for Storing Poultry Leftovers**

Refrigerate at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or less. Wrap turkey and stuffing separately in shallow dishes or platters for storing. Prepare sandwiches on sanitized cutting boards and use clean equipment. To reheat a turkey or serve in a hot dish, rapidly heat it to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit and make sure it is heated thoroughly.

### **Proper Cleansing of Utensils**

To sanitize equipment or utensils after thorough washing and rinsing, immerse them for 30 seconds in clean, hot water at 170 degrees Fahrenheit, or immerse for at least one minute in a clean solution containing at least 50 parts per million of chlorine (one teaspoon of 5.25 percent household bleach per gallon of water at 75 degrees Fahrenheit). For cutting boards or equipment that is too large to immerse for sanitation, swab or wipe the clean surface with the sanitizing solution.

Dr. Rice C. Leach, Public Health Commissioner says, "For our parents and children's sake, let's make a point to make sure all our Thanksgiving meals are prepared, transported and served safely". For more information about food safety, contact the Food Safety Branch for free literature at (502) 564-7181. Also, visit the Cabinet for Health

Services, Food Safety Branch web page at <http://publichealth.state.ky.us/Food-Program.htm>.